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# Don Giovanni

W.A. MOZART

ossia *Il dissoluto punito*

Dramma giocoso in due atti  
en deux actes / *in two acts* / in zwei Akten

Libretto Lorenzo da Ponte

Prague/Wien, 1787-88

Don Giovanni	Johannes Weisser, <i>baryton</i>
Leporello	Lorenzo Regazzo, <i>baryton-basse</i>
Donna Elvira	Alexandrina Pendatchanska, <i>soprano</i>
Donna Anna	Olga Pasichnyk, <i>soprano</i>
Don Ottavio	Kenneth Tarver, <i>ténor</i>
Zerlina	Sunhae Im, <i>soprano</i>
Masetto	Nikolay Borchev, <i>basse</i>
Il Commendatore	Alessandro Guerzoni, <i>basse</i>

RIAS Kammerchor

Freiburger Barockorchester

René Jacobs



### *RIAS Kammerchor*

- Sopranos* Katharina Hohlfeld, Christina Kaiser, Anette Lösch,  
Sabine Nürnberger-Gembaczka, Stephanie Petillaurent, Inès Villanueva  
*Altos* Waltraud Heinrich, Regina Jakobi, Bärbel Kaiser, Claudia Türpe  
Hildegard Wiedemann, Marie-Luise Wilke  
*Ténors* Volker Arndt, Reinhold Beiten, Joachim Buhrmann, Wolfgang Ebling  
Christian Mücke, Kai Roterberg  
*Basses* Janusz Gregorowicz, Ingolf Horenburg, Werner Matusch, Paul Mayr  
Andrew Redmond, Klaus Thiem

### *Freiburger Barockorchester*

- Violons 1* Petra Müllejans, Brian Dean, Daniela Helm, Beatrix Hülsemann  
Gerd-Uwe Klein, Kathrin Tröger, Swantje Hoffmann  
*Violons 2* Christa Kittel, Martina Graulich, Brigitte Täubl, Karin Dean  
Martin Jopp, Lotta Suvanto  
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*Flûtes* Karl Kaiser, Paul Dahme  
*Hautbois* Ann-Kathrin Brüggemann, Maike Buhrow  
*Clarinettes* Lorenzo Coppola, Tindaro Capuano  
*Bassons* Donna Agrell, Eyal Streett  
*Cors* Teunis van der Zwart, Bart Aerbeydt  
*Trompettes* Friedemann Immer, François Petit-Laurent  
*Trombones* Keal Couper, Kate Rockett, Werner Engelhard  
*Timbale* Karl Fischer  
*Mandoline* Mauro Squillante  
*Pianoforte* Giorgio Paronuzzi  
*Direction* **René Jacobs**

**CD 1** | 1 | Ouverture 5'35 84

## ATTO PRIMO

### Scena I

2 | No.1 Introduzione Leporello, Donna Anna,  
Don Giovanni, Il Commendatore *Notte e giorno faticar* 5'26 84

### Scena II

3 | Recitativo Don Giovanni, Leporello *Leporello, ove sei?* 0'31 88

### Scena III

4 | Recitativo Donna Anna, Don Ottavio  
No.2 Recitativo accomp. Donna Anna, Don Ottavio *Ah del padre in periglio  
Ma qual mai s'offre, o Dei* 2'52 90

5 | Duetto Donna Anna, Don Ottavio *Fuggi, crudele, fuggi!* 3'53 94

### Scena IV

6 | Recitativo Don Giovanni, Leporello *Orsù, spicciati presto* 1'50 96

### Scena V

7 | No.3 Aria Donna Elvira, Don Giovanni, Leporello *Ah chi mi dice mai* 3'42 100

8 | Recitativo Donna Elvira, Don Giovanni, Leporello *Chi è là?* 3'04 102

9 | No.4 Aria Leporello *Madamina, il catalogo è questo* 5'15 108

### Scena VI

10 | Recitativo Donna Elvira *In questa forma dunque* 0'42 110

### Scena VII

11 | No.5 Coro Zerlina, Masetto, Coro di contadini *Giovinette che fate all'amore* 1'31 110

### Scena VIII

12 | Recitativo Don Giovanni, Leporello, Zerlina, Masetto *Manco male è partita* 2'14 112

13 | No.6 Aria Masetto *Ho capito, signor sì* 1'34 118

### Scena IX

14 | Recitativo Don Giovanni, Zerlina *Alfin siam liberati* 1'49 120

15 | No.7 Duetto Don Giovanni, Zerlina *Là ci darem la mano* 2'59 122

### Scena X

16 | Recitativo Donna Elvira, Zerlina, Don Giovanni *Fermati scellerato* 0'42 124

17 | No.8 Aria Donna Elvira *Ah fuggi il traditor* 1'10 126

### Scena XI

18 | Recitativo Don Giovanni, Don Ottavio, Donna Anna *Mi par ch'oggi il demonio si diverta* 1'07 126

### Scena XII

19 | Recitativo Donna Elvira  
No.9 Quartetto Donna Elvira, Donna Anna,  
Don Ottavio, Don Giovanni *Ah ti ritrovo ancor  
Non ti fidar, o misera* 3'27 130

20 | Recitativo Don Giovanni *Povera sventurata!* 0'24 134

### Scena XIII

21 | No.10 Recitativo accomp. Donna Anna, Don Ottavio *Don Ottavio, son morta!* 3'05 136

22 | Aria Donna Anna *Or sai chi l'onore* 2'43 140

### Scena XIV

23 | Recitativo Don Ottavio *Come mai creder deggio* 0'30 140

24 | No.10a Aria Don Ottavio *Dalla sua pace* 4'19 142

**CD 3****Scena IX**

- 1** | Recitativo **Zerlina, Donna Elvira, Don Ottavio, Masetto** *Dunque quello sei tu* 2'01 216  
 Recitativo **Leporello** *Ah pietà...*

**Scena X**

Recitativo **Donna Elvira, Masetto, Zerlina, Don Ottavio** *Ferma, perfido, ferma...*

**Scena Xa**

- 2** | Recitativo **Zerlina, Leporello** *Restati qua!* 1'46 220  
**3** | No.21a Duetto **Leporello, Zerlina** *Per queste tue manine* 3'13 224

**Scena Xb**

- 4** | Recitativo **Leporello** *[Amico...]* 1'15 226  
*Guarda un po'come stretto*

**Scena Xc**

- 5** | Recitativo **Zerlina, Donna Elvira, Masetto** *Andiam, andiam, signora* 1'02 228

**Scena Xd**

- 6** | No.21b Recitativo accompagnato **Donna Elvira** *In quali eccessi, o Numi* 2'42 230  
**7** | Aria **Donna Elvira** *Mi tradi quell'alma ingrata* 3'50 230

**Scena XI**

- 8** | Recitat. **Don Giovanni, Leporello, Il Commendatore** *Ah ah ah ah, questa è buona* 4'16 232  
**9** | No.22 Duetto **Leporello, Don Giovanni** *O statua gentilissima* 3'25 240

**Scena XII**

- 10** | Recitativo **Don Ottavio, Donna Anna** *Calmatevi, idol mio* 0'59 244  
**11** | No.23 Recitativo accompagnato **Donna Anna** *Crudele! Ah no, mio bene!* 1'30 246  
**12** | Rondo **Donna Anna** *Non mi dir, bell'idol mio* 4'45 246  
**13** | Recitativo **Don Ottavio** *Ah, si segua il suo passo* 0'19 248

**Scena XIII**

- 14** | No.24 Finale **Don Giovanni, Leporello** *Già la mensa è preparata* 4'45 248

**Scena XIV**

- 15** | **Donna Elvira, Don Giovanni, Leporello** *L'ultima prova* 3'49 252

**Scena XV**

- 16** | Il Commendatore, **Don Giovanni, Leporello, Coro** *Don Giovanni, a cenar teco* 5'15 260

**Scena ultima**

- 17** | **Donna Anna, Donna Elvira, Zerlina, Don Ottavio, Masetto, Leporello** *Ah dove è il perfido* 5'42 266

**APPENDIX [PRAG-FASSUNG / VERSION PRAGUE]**

- 18** | Recitativo **Zerlina, Donna Elvira, Don Ottavio, Masetto** *Dunque quello sei tu* 0'27 272  
**19** | No.20 Aria **Leporello** *Ah pietà, signori miei* 1'42 274  
**20** | Recitativo **Donna Elvira, Masetto, Zerlina, Don Ottavio** *Ferma, perfido, ferma* 0'39 276  
**21** | No.21 Aria **Don Ottavio** *Il mio tesoro intanto* 3'55 276



Heute Dienstags den 23 September 1788

Wird von der Guardafenschen Gesellschaft Italienscher Operntrafsen im kön. allhöchster Nationaltheater  
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Ein großes Singspiel in zwey Aufzügen.

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Und die ganz neue vortrefliche Musik ist von dem berühmten Kapellmeister Herrn Mozart, ebenfalls ausdrücklich komponirt worden.

NB. Diese Woche wird Dienstag, Donnerstag, und Samstag, folgende Woche hingegen Montag, Mittwoch, und Freitag, Drey gegeben, und auf diese Art werden in fünfzehn Woche für diese Woche bestete Spielzeit abgerechnet.

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Der Anfang ist um 7 Uhr.

Das Ende um halb 10 Uhr.

**'Recognised as the greatest masterpiece of his genius'**

*Mozart's Don Giovanni*

**An opera for Prague**

Prague, early 1787: the city has been in the grip of 'Figaro' fever for weeks. 'Figaro's songs resounded in the streets, in gardens, and even the harpist at the Bierbank had to play his 'Non più andrai' if he wanted to be heard', we are informed by the first Mozart biographer Franz Xaver Niemetschek. The company of the impresario Pasquale Bondini had staged Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* in Prague in December 1786 and scored a sensational success with it. Reason enough for an 'association of notable connoisseurs and amateurs' to invite the composer to Prague. Mozart stayed in the Bohemian capital from 11 January to 8 February 1787: he conducted his new Symphony in D major K504, later to be known as the 'Prague', at a musical academy in the National Theatre at which he also played piano improvisations that delighted the audience, and finally, on 22 January, conducted a performance of *Figaro* himself. When he returned to Vienna, he was not only 1,000 gulden richer, he also had in his pocket a commission from Bondini to compose a new opera for the forthcoming autumn season.

That new opera was *Don Giovanni*. Mozart certainly turned soon after his return from Prague to Lorenzo Da Ponte, the tried and tested librettist of *Figaro*. If we are to believe the account Da Ponte gave years later in his *Memoirs*, it was he who chose the subject for Mozart. Is it really true that the poet sought inspiration in reading the *Inferno* from Dante's *Divina Comedia*? In any case, where Mozart's inspiration came from, and how his work on *Don Giovanni* progressed in general, are questions to which we have no certain answers for lack of documentary evidence. What we do know is that for the whole of that year he gave no concerts of his own in Vienna. On the other hand, between March and August 1787, he set down on paper a succession

of impressive masterpieces, several of them sombre and weighty works: they include the Rondo for piano in A minor K511, the String Quintets in C major K515 and G minor K516, *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* K525, and the Violin Sonata in A major K526. Nor should it be forgotten that, on 28 May, Leopold Mozart died in Salzburg. In his last letter to his father, dated 4 April, Mozart broaches the subject of his grave illness and attempts to find a few consoling words (perhaps intended more for himself than for the sick man): 'As death . . . is the true goal of our existence, I have formed during the last few years such close relations with this best and truest friend of mankind, that his image is not only no longer terrifying for me, but is indeed very soothing and consoling! And I thank my God for graciously granting me the opportunity . . . of learning that death is the key which unlocks the door to our true happiness.'

Work on *Don Giovanni* must have been Mozart's chief preoccupation in the summer months. However, when he set off for Prague with Constanze on 1 October, several numbers were not yet written. The overture, the whole second-act finale and a number of other pieces were composed only in Prague. Here haste was imperative at first, for the premiere of *Don Giovanni* was to take place on 14 October, in a gala performance to mark the passage through the city of Archduchess Maria Theresia of Tuscany and her consort, Prince Anton Clemens of Saxony. But serious difficulties in rehearsal meant the deadline had to be postponed several times. Mozart had completely misjudged the capacities of what he called the 'theatrical personnel' of Bondini's company, and finally the illness of one of the singers further disrupted the plans. So he ended up conducting an impromptu performance of *Figaro* in honour of the princely couple on 14 October, thereby eliciting 'universal applause and satisfaction from the illustrious personages'. The latter were thus not to hear the festival opera that had been intended for them: they already left Prague on 15 October. It was only a fortnight later, on 29 October, that *Don Giovanni* was finally given its first performance at the Gräfllich Nostitzsches Nationaltheater, of which Bondini was manager.

The Prague public gave *Don Giovanni* an enthusiastic reception comparable to that of *Figaro* ten months previously. The *Prager Oberposamtszeitung* reports of the

premiere: 'On Monday 29th the Italian opera company gave the eagerly awaited opera of Kapellmeister Mozart *Don Giovanni* or *The Stone Banquet*. Connoisseurs and musicians declare that nothing like this has ever been performed in Prague. Herr Mozart himself conducted . . .' And Mozart wrote to a friend on 4 November: 'My opera *Don Giovanni* had its first performance on 29 October, and was received with the greatest applause.' Even many years after Mozart's death, Georg Nikolaus Nissen, the second husband of the composer's widow, could affirm: '*Don Juan* is the favourite opera of the most discerning public in Prague.' And for Niemetschek, himself a citizen of Prague, it was self-evident that this opera was 'recognised as the greatest masterpiece of his [Mozart's] genius'.

### **Don Giovanni in Vienna**

The success of *Don Giovanni* in Prague was not without consequences for Mozart's position in Vienna. Emperor Joseph II appointed him 'Imperial and Royal Chamber Composer' in succession to Christoph Willibald Gluck, who had just died, with an annual salary of 800 gulden. Not the least of his motives in so doing was to forestall Mozart's rumoured move away from Vienna. Moreover, he commanded a performance of *Don Giovanni* for the coming spring. But Mozart chose to make some changes for this Viennese premiere, which took place at the Burgtheater on 7 May 1788: he substituted the newly composed aria 'Dalla sua pace' (no.10a) for Don Ottavio's 'Il mio tesoro intanto' (no.21), supposedly because the tenor of the Viennese performance was afraid of the runs in the original piece; he replaced Leporello's aria 'Ah pietà, signori miei' (no.20) by a *secco* recitative and inserted the duet for Leporello and Zerlina 'Per queste tue manine' (no.21a), which necessitated further rearrangement of the recitatives; and he gave Donna Elvira a third aria introduced by an *accompagnato* recitative, 'In quali eccessi – Mi tradì quell'alma ingrata' (no.21b). Finally – and this would have been the most drastic departure from Prague – he seems to have considered completely omitting the *scena ultima*, the concluding sextet following

Don Giovanni's descent to hell. Even today it is unclear whether the opera was indeed performed without this last scene in Vienna in 1788. However, it is certain that the sextet was generally dispensed with after Mozart's death, for instance in Franz Xaver Süssmayr's performance of 1798.

Many of the Viennese were at a loss to understand Mozart's new opera. Countess de la Lippe *trouve la musique savante, peu propre au chant* ('found the music learned and little suited to the voice'), as Count Karl von Zinzendorf noted in his diary. Archduchess Elisabeth Wilhemine was similarly sceptical when writing to her husband about *Don Giovanni*: '... mais on m'a dit qu'il n'avait pas eu beaucoup de succès' ('but I was told that it had not met with much success'). If we are to believe Da Ponte's *Memoirs*, the Emperor put his finger on the problem: 'That opera is precious, divine, perhaps better even than *Figaro*; but such music is not meat for the teeth of my Viennese.' Still, it was given in Vienna fifteen times during the year 1788 – Joseph II could only be present at the last of these performances – before disappearing from Viennese theatres for the next few years.

### Incorrigible sinner or demonic seducer?

Unlike Figaro, Don Giovanni was a popular subject in the musical theatre of the time. Merely in the year Mozart's opera was written, three Don Giovanni operas were produced in Italy. Of these, the setting by Giuseppe Gazzaniga occupies a special position. His *Don Giovanni o sia Il convitato di pietra* (Don Giovanni or the stone guest), to a libretto by Giovanni Bertati, received its premiere at the Teatro San Moisè in Venice in February 1787. The libretto must have come into Da Ponte's hands shortly after this, perhaps through the tenor Antonio Baglioni, who appeared in Gazzaniga's opera and later sang Mozart's Don Ottavio. Strictly speaking, Da Ponte's *Don Giovanni* libretto is a 'remake': the parallels between his text and Bertati's show all too clearly that he was using his fellow Italian's work as the basis of his own. Not only did he model the opera's action on that of the earlier piece, he even borrowed

some passages word for word. Nonetheless, his *Don Giovanni* involves a personal contribution that is by no means negligible, for with Da Ponte the opera is in two acts, not one as with Bertati. Hence the conclusion of the first act (after the quartet 'Non ti fidar') and a considerable portion of the second (up to the cemetery scene) were additions made to expand the work, and are original Da Ponte. In his *Memoirs*, though, the latter deliberately passes over in silence his use of Bertati's text as a model.

To be sure, 'Don Giovanni' or 'Don Juan' was already a subject with a long history. All literary treatments of the theme of the young debauchee (a '*giovane cavaliere estremamente licenzioso*' in Da Ponte's description), whether in opera or in the spoken theatre, derive ultimately from the comedy *El burlador de Sevilla y Convivado de piedra* (The trickster of Seville, or the stone guest) by the Mercedarian monk Tirso de Molina, first published in 1630. It was not only important figures, like Molière in his prose comedy *Dom Juan ou Le festin de pierre* (1665), who tackled the subject. Dramatic pieces about Don Juan were part of the permanent repertoire of playhouses and puppet theatres in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Hence it could be taken for granted that the story was well known. It made a particularly popular subject because of its spine-chilling elements – Don Juan's encounter with the commander and his fall into hell. And, not least, it raised a religious question: the problem of man's justification. Can a human being, Don Juan in this case, be saved in spite of his transgressions? He can, provided he renounces his vices in time. But this is precisely what Don Juan does not do. Already in Tirso he turns a deaf ear to warnings of divine punishment and puts off repentance until later. When he finally asks the dead man's hand for forgiveness, it is too late for him. Don Juan is therefore, in Christian terms, nothing less than an exemplum of the punishment of the incorrigible sinner. His transgression lies, to be sure, in his amorous escapades. But it consists also in the denial of any metaphysically orientated system of values, as is clearly shown in the cemetery scene when he invites the dead commander to the banquet. The cause of Don Juan's downfall is his exclusive preoccupation with this world.

These references were certainly present in the minds of late eighteenth-century spectators. Mozart's time seems to have had a quite different image of the subject-matter of *Don Giovanni* from ours today. Our view is almost exclusively determined by Mozart's opera itself, or even more so by the interpretation to which the opera was subjected in the nineteenth century, which turned the title character into a wicked, sensuously erotic seducer, a fascinating figure opposed to all moral restraints. Not least responsible for this transformation was the enthusiastic interpretation of E. T. A. Hoffmann. The demonisation of the hero, who according to his tale 'Don Juan' (1813) 'flits restlessly from one beautiful woman to an even more beautiful one' yet without ever finding satisfaction, was taken a decisive step forward by Hoffmann, and his assessment of *Don Giovanni* as the 'opera of operas' became the generally accepted view. The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard even built a whole aesthetic of music on this work: according to him, the sensuous and erotic genius of the title character, brought to a peak of intensity, could only be fully realised through music, Mozart's music, and thereby simultaneously took on a demonic nature. Interpretations of this sort in the early nineteenth century masked the original motivation of the subject of Don Juan. They turned Mozart's *dramma giocoso* (that is, *opera buffa*) into a heroic opera, and the punished rake into a tragic hero. Yet nothing could have been further from Mozart's intentions.

ANDREAS FRIESENHAGEN  
Translation: Charles Johnston



## BURNING QUESTIONS

René Jacobs

*Twenty-four years after Cesti's L'Orondea, you put on this production of Don Giovanni at the Innsbruck Early Music Festival in August 2006. So is Mozart 'early music' for you?*

Mozart himself used the term *alte Musik* ('old music') to refer to Bach and Handel, composers from whom he was separated only by a few generations. In this respect, his music is much 'older' for us, who live several centuries after him, than Bach's music was for him. But if we wish to approach Mozart as the end of a journey that began with Monteverdi (and not the reverse, with Wagner as the starting-point), it is precisely because the path he followed in his musical training was still founded on the musical theories of the Baroque. It's much easier to tackle the genre of the *dramma giocoso*, with its sometimes confusing, even shocking blend of tragic and comic elements, when you try to understand it as part of a long tradition that starts with the Venetian operas of Cavalli and Cesti. For example, Cicognini, who wrote the librettos of *Il Giasone* and *L'Orondea*<sup>1</sup>, was also the author of the first *Don Giovanni* in the Italian spoken theatre. In this light, you could also see our version of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* as the third part of an operatic trilogy that began at Innsbruck and Brussels in 2004 with Cavalli's *Eliogabalo*, whose libretto was influenced by *commedia dell'arte* scenarios on the theme of Don Juan, and continued with Conti's *Don Chisciotte* (Innsbruck 2005, Brussels 2010): Don Quixote is not only the exact opposite of Don Juan, he is also a Spanish don with a comic servant. In a way, *Don Giovanni* is the least-known of the Da Ponte operas, even though it's the most frequently performed. This is bound up with the fact that the original was falsified in the nineteenth century (just as a picture can be falsified by later 'overpainting') and the public often knows

1. Two operas by Francesco Cavalli and Antonio Cesti respectively, now available as downloads.



only this adulterated version. I am convinced that we must first of all eliminate, or in any case clean up, the overpaintings added in the nineteenth century<sup>2</sup> to allow the original colours to come to light.

**You are referring here to the Romantic conception of the opera which dates back to E. T. A. Hoffmann and has influenced virtually all productions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Why do you reject this?**

In their treatment of the myth of Don Juan, Hoffmann and so many other men of letters after him were constantly guilty of projecting their own fantasies. There's nothing wrong with that, and these repeated rewritings of the myth have opened out interesting perspectives. But interpreting the myth is one thing, and perversely distorting and manipulating Da Ponte's text and Mozart's music is another. The difference between the original version of Mozart's opera and the myth gets nearly every production of *Il dissoluto punito* into trouble. If you don't make use of the myth, you take the risk of making the public unhappy; but if you do go back to the myth, you are in constant conflict with the structure of Mozart's opera. We much prefer the risk of displeasing the public to betraying the work.

For Hoffmann<sup>3</sup>, Don Giovanni is a tragic hero, restlessly searching for the woman in whose arms he can satisfy his yearning for a union with the infinite. Donna Anna is raised so far above the other characters that her 'luminous personality' becomes the true antagonist of Don Giovanni. Longing for the infinite, the inaccessible, redemption through emotion, through love, which is accomplished here in a tragic death . . . a splendid invention, which has nothing to do with the piece: in fact, a seductive falsification. If Don Giovanni does have an antagonist, it is not Donna Anna, but Donna Elvira, the *donna abbandonata* of Baroque opera, forsaken by Don Giovanni as Ariadne once was by Theseus (as in Monteverdi's *Lamento d'Arianna*). Elvira's is

**by far the most moving role in the opera. Her love for Don Giovanni is totally irrational and profoundly self-destructive.**

If I try to imagine how Hoffmann's *Don Giovanni* would sound, I hear strains of Wagner, or at most a completely distorted Mozart, played and sung much too heavily, with the wrong tempos, and, above all, much too uniform. All the subversion inherent to the *dramma giocoso* is condemned to oblivion by an interpretation of this kind. There can no longer be any question of a brutal mixture of comic and tragic. Indeed, many comic, carnival-like elements had already disappeared even before Hoffmann's time, immediately after Mozart's death, when the opera was increasingly transformed into a *singspiel*: Da Ponte's recitatives were replaced by banal German dialogue, and everything that could relativise particular aspects of the work was cut – including the *scena ultima*, even though Hoffmann defended it!

**So Don Giovanni isn't a demonic figure; he's not a twin to Faust who scorns the power of the hereafter right to the bitter end, and thereby attains heroic grandeur. But if he's none of that, what is he?**

Mozart doesn't answer that question in his music as he does for the adversaries of Don Giovanni, in the psychologising language of the arias for Donna Anna, Donna Elvira, Zerlina and Don Ottavio. Don Giovanni's arias – two short action arias, one of them sung in a disguised voice<sup>4</sup>, and the serenade to Donna Elvira's maid – tell us absolutely *nothing* about his character, for the simple reason that the composer wants the question to remain unanswered.

Fortunately, Da Ponte's libretto contains certain elements, generally ignored, which can take us a bit further – although not quite far enough. To begin with, we can read the description '*Un giovane estremamente licenzioso*' – 'an extremely dissipated youth' – next to Don Giovanni's name in the cast-list. Da Ponte obviously thought it very important to make it clear right from the start that we are dealing here not with

2. The reader is recommended to consult Dieter Borchmeyer's essay *Mozart oder Die Entdeckung der Liebe* (Frankfurt: Insel, 2005), which calls for a '*Don Giovanni* without the nineteenth century'.

3. E. T. A. Hoffmann, 'Don Juan', in *Phantasiestücke in Callot's Manier* (1816).

4. Luigi Bassi (1766-1825), the creator of the title role in Prague, was well known for his skill in imitating the voices of his colleagues.

an adult, but with a sort of Cherubino five years older than he is in *Le nozze di Figaro* (in the meantime his voice has broken, descending from mezzo-soprano to baritone), and now on an infernal path of taboo-breaking that must inevitably lead to death. It should be remembered that Luigi Bassi, Mozart's Don Giovanni in Prague, was only twenty-one years old – and, by the way, the singer in our recording is barely older than that.<sup>5</sup> The contrast between the young man who is not quite an adult and his older comic servant had constituted one of the recurring elements of Italian comic opera since the Venetians, and of spoken theatre ever since ancient comedy.

The latest taboo Don Giovanni has broken is the murder of the Commendatore with which the work opens. Each time he becomes violent (whether towards Zerlina, Leporello or Masetto), we are afraid that, in place of the old 'kick' he got from destroying the ties of love, he might get a new one from killing people. Fortunately, heaven intervenes in time: thus Don Giovanni is not a tragic hero, but a tragicomic failure (the libretto portrays a succession of erotic fiascos), who gets his just deserts not from mankind (the police turn up too late in the *scena ultima!*) but from a higher power.

**But Hoffmann's view of Donna Anna might still be right: her secret passion, her love for the stranger who tried to ravish her. How can we imagine even for a moment that woman as strong as this could love a weakling like Don Ottavio?**

There is nothing to support this 'ideological' viewpoint, either in Da Ponte's libretto or in Mozart's music. Donna Anna, Don Ottavio and the Commendatore form 'a sentimental [*empfindsam*] triangle of the kind one encounters in innumerable late eighteenth-century dramas' (Borchmeyer). Don Ottavio is not a weakling, but rather 'the typical tender fiancé, whose measured love, never offending against the contemporary code of feeling in its dissimulation of passion and sensuality, harmonises perfectly with the father-daughter relationship'. His two arias are characteristically *empfindsam*

5. One critic attending a performance of our production in Innsbruck compared Don Giovanni to the James Dean character in *Rebel without a Cause*, a young man who dices with death by braving social prohibitions.

numbers.<sup>6</sup> In both versions of the opera, Mozart wanted Don Ottavio to sing just one aria, as if he remained in the Donna Anna's shadow. These two arias are supremely beautiful, but there can be no doubt that the Vienna one ('Dalla sua pace') appears at a much more sensible point than the aria in the Prague version ('Il mio tesoro'), which gives the impression of having been artificially inserted at too advanced a stage in the action: Don Ottavio, at last convinced of Don Giovanni's guilt after a long period of doubt, has decided to act by going to the police.

Far removed from Hoffmann's dismissive view of Don Ottavio ('a dainty, well-scrubbed, spick and span little man'), a number of modern writers (Friedrich Dieckmann, Stefan Kunze, Dieter Borchmeyer, Julian Rushton) see in him a 'man of the future' in his combination of sensibility and rationalism. Interpreted in this way, Don Ottavio is 'the erotic opposite of Don Giovanni' (Borchmeyer). Against the absolute, unquestioning nature of the *dissoluto*, Don Ottavio represents 'the altruism fostered by the discourse of *Empfindsamkeit*'; against Don Giovanni's instinct of erotic possession stands Ottavio's 'disciplining of eroticism'; against the former's violence is set the latter's non-violence, which links him with the 'clemency' of Titus: for him, armed force is only a last resort – incidentally, it was the same singer who created the two roles of Tito and Don Ottavio at the Prague premieres of the works. There is certainly a moralising intention behind this contrast between a 'feudal and aristocratic libertine' and a new 'model citizen'. It can already be heard, in quasi-programmatic fashion, in the Overture: whereas the slow D minor section is to be understood as a prefiguration of the ghostly apparition of the stone guest at the end of the work, Mozart builds the faster section, in D major, on a theme that is to be read as a quotation of Don Ottavio's first vocal phrase in the Act II sextet (when he returns with Donna Anna from her father's funeral service).

6. The German adjective *empfindsam* is used here with reference to *Empfindsamkeit*, the movement propagating 'sensibility' or 'sentimentalism' in late eighteenth-century German literature; these two English words were used with more or less the same meaning in the 'sentimental comedies' or 'dramas of sensibility' and 'sentimental novels' (e.g. Richardson's *Pamela*) then current in Britain.

**Borchmeyer emphasises the fact that in the nineteenth century, and even the twentieth, the role of Donna Anna has generally been cast 'against vocal type and to the detriment of the coloratura', since it has very often been sung by a dramatic soprano . . .**

Yes; and now compare to that statement what the *Theatertalmanach* of 1788 has to say about Aloisia Lange, the Donna Anna of Mozart's Viennese production: 'She plays leading ingénue roles, tender and gentle, as well as naïve or mischievous parts.' That doesn't sound at all like a dramatic soprano! In her aria in the first act, 'Or sai chi l'onore', Donna Anna for the second time asks Don Ottavio to avenge her father, but that doesn't make it a 'vengeance aria' which, as is often asserted, would require a dramatic soprano. It's really much more of a love aria, whose extremely sensitive last two bars, with their *piano* ending, are inconsistent with the 'vengeance' hypothesis. Borchmeyer interprets these last few bars as 'an expression of daughterly love and a tender gesture of farewell to Don Ottavio'. But it would be still more sagacious to view them as a question mark: can Donna Anna's love survive? And in contrast with this, the triumphant, forceful orchestral postlude to 'Non mi dir' (her second aria) can be seen as reinforcing what Donna Anna expresses in the coloratura passages (the only ones in the opera) that Berlioz so hated: she is formulating the unsayable (for it is still too soon for speech), giving a wordless answer to the question that remains open at the end of the first aria – 'Yes, love *will* conquer'. The usual argument, that Donna Anna can't really love her fiancé if she asks him for a year's grace, betrays (to quote Borchmeyer once more) 'a lack of understanding of the civilised traditions of "polite society" at this period'. The perfect harmony of the two voices in the G-major Larghetto of the *scena ultima* reveal what the meaningful coloratura of 'Non mi dir' was intended to convey: not 'Don Giovanni will never embrace this woman whose pure heart saved her from becoming Satan's intended bride', as Hoffmann writes, but 'Don Ottavio *will* embrace his beloved, but to do so today would be entirely out of place'.

**This set presents Don Giovanni in its Vienna version, but includes the numbers cut from the Prague version in an appendix. Why didn't you record a mixed version, as is standard practice?**

The two versions are of absolutely equal value. Mozart may initially have composed the supplementary numbers for Vienna in order to showcase the special qualities of the new singers. For instance, Caterina Cavalieri, for whom he wrote the additional aria 'Mi tradi' in the second act, was a typical *opera seria* singer, whereas her colleague in Prague, Caterina Micelli, was more an interpreter of *mezzo carattere* roles (that is, half-serious, half-buffo), who probably had a less beautiful voice, but was a better actress. The farcical duet scene for Zerlina and Leporello, also added to the second act (to replace Leporello's aria 'Ah pietà'), was certainly designed for the acting talents of the two singers in Vienna, Luisa Mombelli, the first Countess, who had originally been cast as Donna Anna but was seven months pregnant and found the role of Zerlina less taxing, and Francesco Benucci, the first Figaro. It won't do to say that the coarse comedy of this scene doesn't fit in with rest of the work, as is still claimed by many commentators who can't accept the consequences of the *dramma giocoso*. It's written in the purest *commedia dell'arte* style with a long recitative that moves the action forward and a burlesque duet which is a musical gem and not at all 'weak', as the commentators parrot one after the other; and it comes immediately before Donna Elvira's *lamento* 'Mi tradi' and the graveyard scene, supposedly 'tragic' but in fact composed in the comic style.

In both Prague and Vienna versions, Mozart shows his sure instinct for the correct balance between recitatives, arias and ensembles. In the Vienna version, if he hadn't made the decision, undoubtedly justified in dramaturgical terms, to place Don Ottavio's aria 'Dalla sua pace', newly composed as an *empfindsam* answer to Donna Anna's 'Or sai chi l'onore', in the first act and not, like his Prague aria 'Il mio tesoro', in the second, Act II would unquestionably have been too long. It's this delicate balance that is missing in the 'mixed' version (which includes both arias for Don Ottavio and Elvira's aria 'Mi tradi', but not the 'undignified' comic duet for Zerlina and Leporello):

there, as a result of what amounts to a 'traffic jam' of arias without any comic interludes (in total contradiction of the *giocos* spirit), the second act is longer and less varied than Mozart judged appropriate. What's more, in the Vienna version, 'Mi tradi' is dramatically justified in the recitative which precedes it, whereas in the 'mixed' version it produces the effect of an inserted concert aria.<sup>7</sup>

### **What made Mozart cut the scena ultima in Vienna?**

The claim that he actually did so should be seriously questioned. As long ago as 1961, the musicologist Christof Bitter proved with hard facts that this moralising 'comedy ending' was probably given in Vienna too.<sup>8</sup> The solid documentation I'm referring to is the copy of the autograph score prepared for the Viennese performances, together with a portion of the orchestral material which Bitter discovered: these permit a very precise reconstruction of the performances. Yet the 'popular' Mozart literature, even the most recent, has taken virtually no account of Bitter's research, even though it was accepted by the editors of the New Mozart Edition (NMA). It's even worse when stick-in-the-mud directors use the false premise that Mozart supposedly cut the final scene in Vienna to justify a staging that may look modern, but in fact goes back to mistaken post-Hoffmann conceptions.

If Mozart did perhaps toy with the idea of omitting this scene – it is in fact missing from the Viennese wordbook printed some weeks before the premiere – this was only, as Stefan Kunze has shown, because he may have thought during the early

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7. A passing remark that is not without its importance: behind the two long 'official' acts of the opera as it stands there was probably an initial design in four shorter acts, as if *Le nozze di Figaro* had been used as a model. As in *Figaro*, the 'first act' ends with an aria (Donna Anna's 'Or sai chi l'onore' in the Prague version, Don Ottavio's 'Dalla sua pace' in Vienna). The 'third' act starts where the 'official' second act begins and is concluded by the grand sextet, whose closing section functions like a proper act finale. In the Vienna version, the burlesque scene for Zerlina and Leporello stands at the opening of the 'fourth' act, and here too we can see a parallel with *Figaro*: Zerlina and Marcellina, who sings her first full aria in Act IV, are both convinced feminists . . .

8. Christof Bitter, *Wandlungen in den Inszenierungsformen des "Don Giovanni" von 1787 bis 1928*. Forschungsbeiträge zur Musikwissenschaft, X (Regensburg: 1961).

rehearsals that ending the opera with a more spectacular conclusion, maybe with the chorus of demons onstage and not in the wings as they had been in Prague, would be more effective for a 'metropolitan' audience, elegant but somewhat superficial, even conceited. He had no thought of a tragic ending of the kind so loved by the nineteenth century. Fortunately he gave up this plan, quite simply because this last scene was musically indispensable: it is the 'ultimate return to and confirmation of the principal key of D major after a long horror episode in "tragic" D minor, which has modulated in every direction except to the tonic major'.

### **Don Giovanni has been regularly given, without interruption, from its premiere right down to our own time. There is a singular continuity in the performing tradition of this opera; so how could the original tempos sometimes be modified as fundamentally as they are in some of the available recordings?**

There are several reasons for this. In the first place, the categories of operatic roles current in the eighteenth century became totally obsolete in the nineteenth. Eighteenth-century practice divided roles into serious (*parti serie*), comic (*parti buffe*), and mixed, part-serious and part-comic (*parti di mezzo carattere*). The serious roles, like Donna Anna and Don Ottavio, in which the essential prerequisite is a high degree of vocal artistry, with flexible voices, light but rich in tone-colour, were suited to the *bel canto* of the time with its improvised variations.<sup>9</sup> In the buffo roles, such as Zerlina, Leporello and Masetto, acting talent was the predominant factor; these

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9. Vocal improvisation was the norm even in the *mezzo carattere* roles. Don Giovanni, for example, cannot sing the second strophe of his serenade without a few graceful and seductive 'ad libitum decorations' (*willkürliche Änderungen*), as they were termed at the time. To leave this arietta or Cherubino's 'Voi che sapete' unadorned would have been considered unimaginative and crude by Mozart and his public. Little cadenzas and *Eingänge* (improvised transitions which introduce the reprise of the principal melody) were taken for granted, even in buffo parts, which sometimes parody singers of *opera seria*. Improvisation in general still played an important role, and this also applied to instrumental parts (the fortepiano and cello, both in the recitatives and in the preludes they could add at the beginning of a scene). Fortunately, everything was not yet written down in the score!

voices might be light and sparkling like Zerlina's, of middling weight like Masetto's, or heavier still like that of Leporello, who however must also be a virtuoso at handling the fast patter so typical of buffo roles. Finally there are the *mezzo carattere* roles such as Donna Elvira and Don Giovanni, who are at home in both serious and buffo contexts. In the nineteenth century, when both opera houses and orchestras grew ever larger, the great variety of voices that existed in the eighteenth century – as varied as are human beings themselves – was impossible to maintain, and bigger, heavier and thus slower voices became dominant.

A second reason for this general slowing of tempo is the psychological factor that comes into play when the same work is constantly performed, and the music becomes so well known and loved that there is a tendency to make the pleasure of enjoying it again last as long as possible. And finally, in the case of *Don Giovanni*, it is certainly the Romantic interpretation of the work that is chiefly to blame for tempos that are either too slow or too fast.

### **All the same, Mozart didn't actually leave us any metronome marks . . .**

No, but we have three reliable clues which can lead us back to the authentic tempos. First and most important: the composer's own indications, which must be read exactly as they were interpreted in the treatises of the time. Thus an *andante* ('at a walking pace') in common time but marked *alla breve*, that is with the minim and not the crotchet as the basic rhythmic unit (and thus beaten in two, not in four), is considerably faster than an *adagio* ('slow') in 4/4 without this indication. The breathtaking 'tragic' final scene of the opera with the entrance of the statue and Don Giovanni's descent into hell, which precedes the true ending in the comedy tradition, is written in the first of these two tempos, but is still played in virtually every performance at the latter tempo, which is to say much too slowly. When the right tempo is employed, the result is a genuine verbal cut-and-thrust (but not a singing competition or a shouting-match!) between Don Giovanni, the Commendatore and Leporello, which parallels the actual duel that begins the opera. The exchange becomes more and

more heated (two accelerations of tempo are marked), and finally so fast that the 'crazy' violin semiquavers sound not only virtuosic, but literally hellish!

Now to the second element. In the late eighteenth century, action ensembles replaced the old recitatives of Baroque opera; it follows that they should be sung *parlando*, in a conversational style. 'Everything *parlando*: that is what Mozart wanted.' These are the words of the aged Luigi Bassi as reported by the *Wiener Allgemeine Musikzeitschrift* in 1845 (quoted by Bitter). Mozart already found at the time that his casts tended to sing too much in the ensembles, 'as if, in a quartet, one should not speak much more than sing' (letter to his father dated 27 December 1780). Hence the arrival of the stone guest must be taken at a faster tempo – a true *Andante alla breve* as Mozart stipulates: at too slow a speed, neither Don Giovanni, nor the Commendatore – who is not a symbol of eternity<sup>10</sup> – nor Leporello, with his terrified babbling, would be in a position to sing *parlando*! It is only in the contemplative ensembles, where the action comes to a halt, that time too stops: the tempo slows down, and instead of speaking, the characters most often sing *sotto voce*.

And finally, the metrical character of many arias and ensembles contains perfectly 'decodable' dance rhythms. Three dances play a particularly important role in this opera: the aristocratic and feudal minuet, in which the partners scarcely touched one another; the modern contredanse in which the participants changed partners, a dance closely linked with the bourgeoisie, but also with the French Revolution (the song 'Ah, ça ira, ça ira', heard amid the barricades in Paris, was a contredanse!); and finally the *Teitsch* ('German dance'), a 'subversive' peasant dance and forerunner of the waltz, which was extremely fast and frenetic, sometimes even obscene. These three dances are heard simultaneously at the ball in the first act, a sort of musical orgy with three conflicting rhythms, a collapse of both the musical and the dramatic order (it occurs at the very moment when Don Giovanni attempts to ravish

<sup>10</sup> At this last hour, the Commendatore is still only half-dead and therefore speaks, half-human, in minims ('half-notes', as both German and American usage have it), that is to say at half the speed of the others.

Zerlina). The contredanse that Don Giovanni dances with Zerlina at the ball is already 'announced' earlier in the work, in the celebrated 'champagne aria'. If one wishes to maintain this highly significant hidden dance rhythm – which is speeded up by the tempo marking (*presto*) – it is necessary to adopt a tempo that, while still remaining very rapid, is not as brutal and rushed as what we usually hear.

Don Giovanni has important things to say in this 'drinking song' which is in fact a dance-song. When he sings it he is in the process of organising the ball with Leporello, and gives the instruction 'Senz' alcun ordine la danza sia' (literally, 'let the dance follow no order'). In an excessively fast, demonically distorted performance, the words retreat into incomprehensibility and the singer finds himself with acute breathing problems. But our Don Giovanni has been 'de-demonised': he still has to sing rapidly – Leporello only has a couple of hours to get hold of the girls his master is counting on to expand his list – but also with pleasurable anticipation of what (he thinks!) is to come.

RENÉ JACOBS

*Translation: Charles Johnston*



Title page of the original manuscript of Don Giovanni (Prague, 1787). Salzburg, Bibliotheca Mozartiana. AKG-images / Marion Kalter.